# Vladimir Mayakovsky

# WHAT SHALL I BE ?

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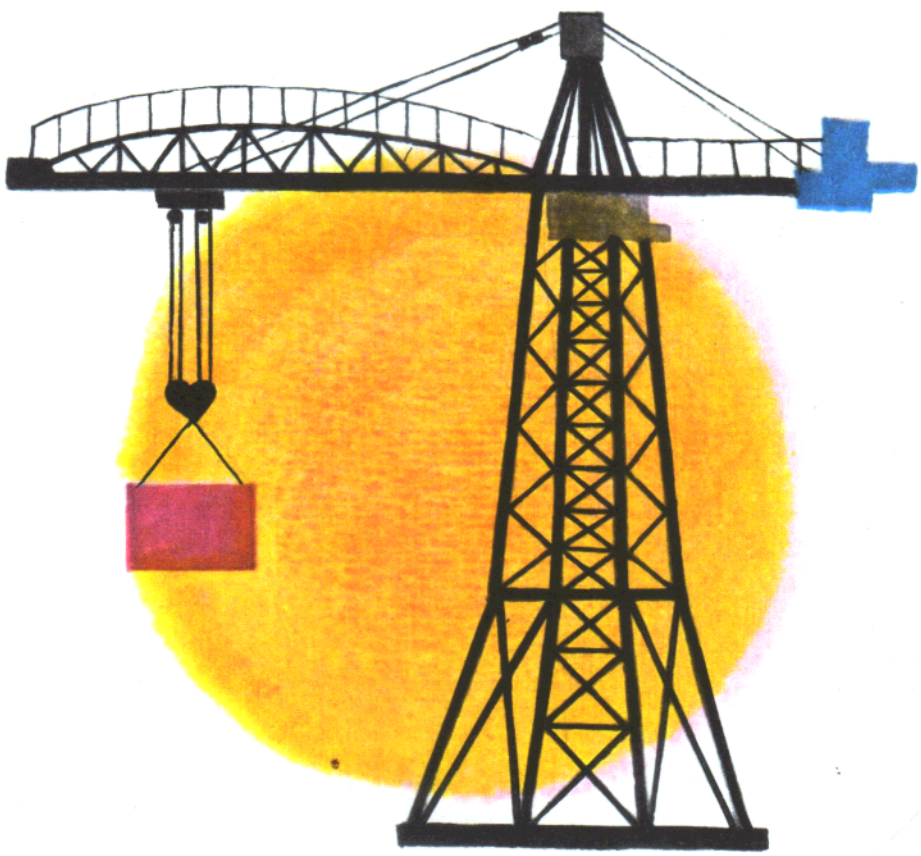

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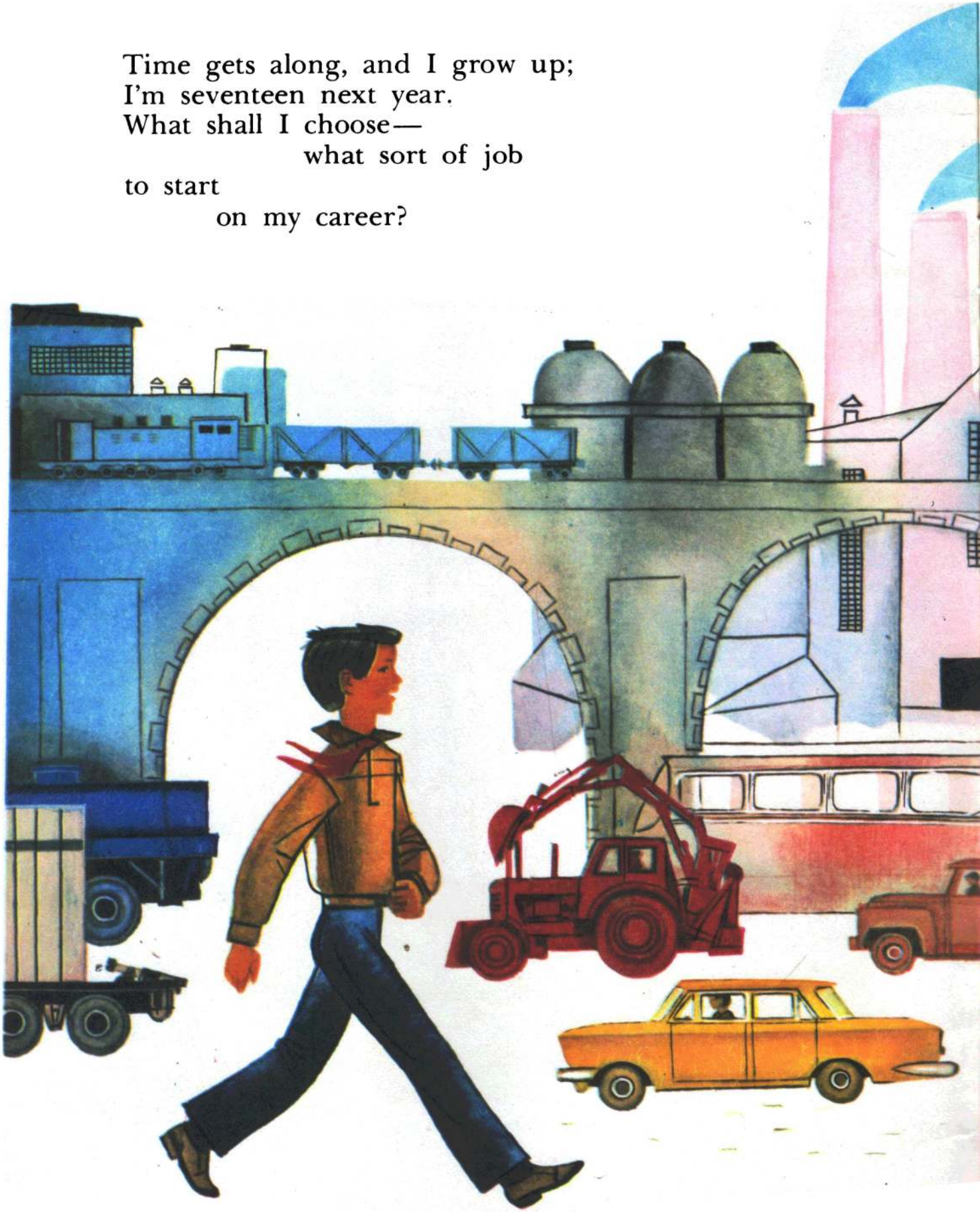
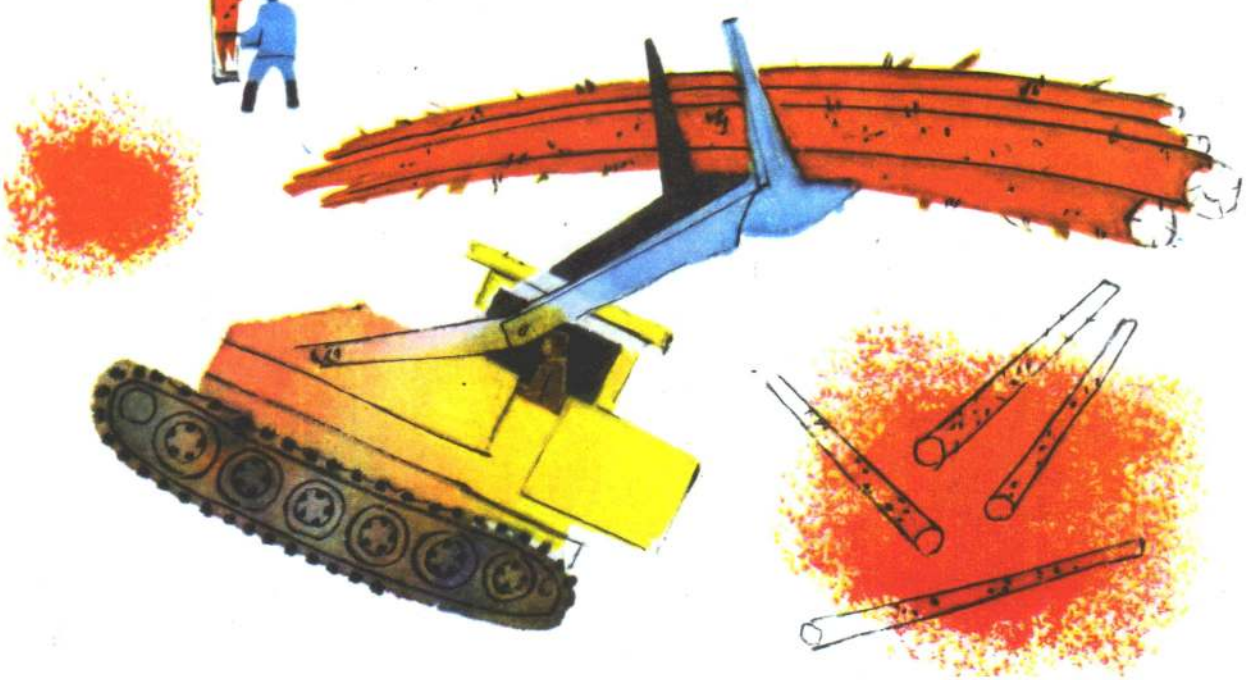
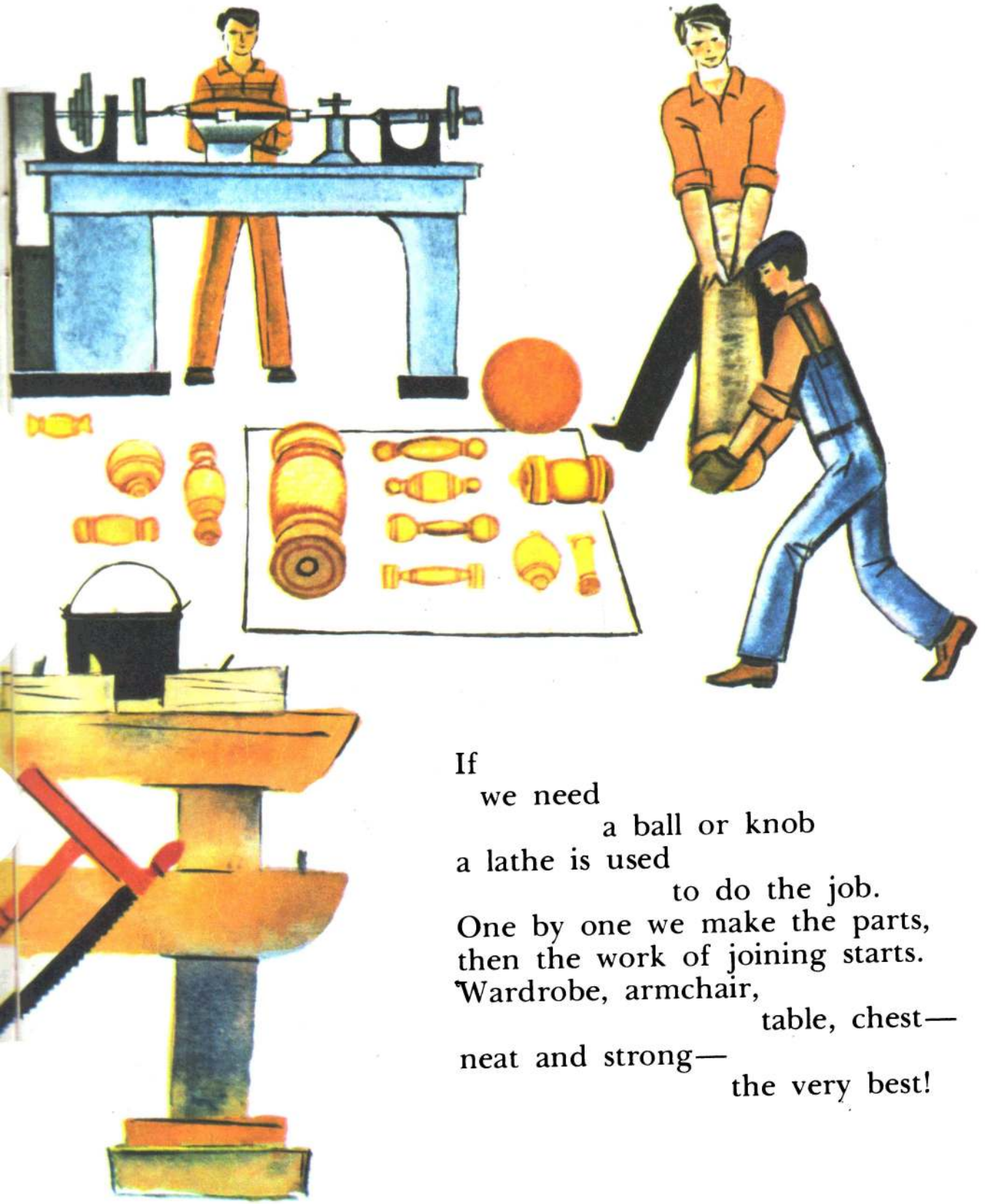
Time gets along, and I grow up;
I'm seventeen next year.
What shall I choose—
what sort of job
to start
on my career?



Carpenters are clever folk.
Making furniture's no joke;
we take
a big, round log,
first thing,
and to a bench
the log we bring.
Now we saw it—
like that!—
into planks,
long and flat.
After working such a lot
the busy saw
becomes red-hot.
Round about the sawdust flies—
there in yellow heaps it lies.

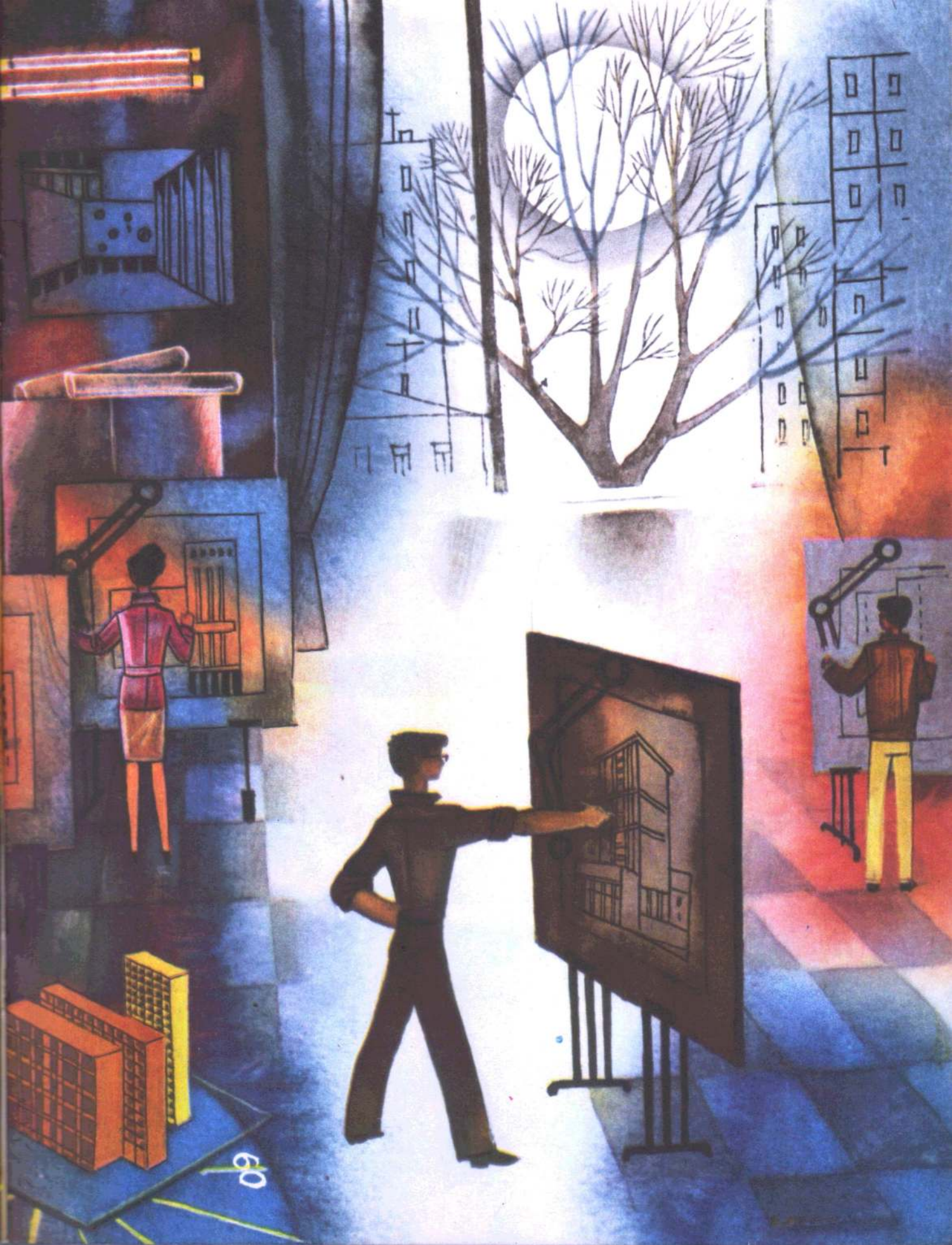


Now
we take a plane
and set to work again.
Back and forth,
to and fro—
off the knots and snags all go.

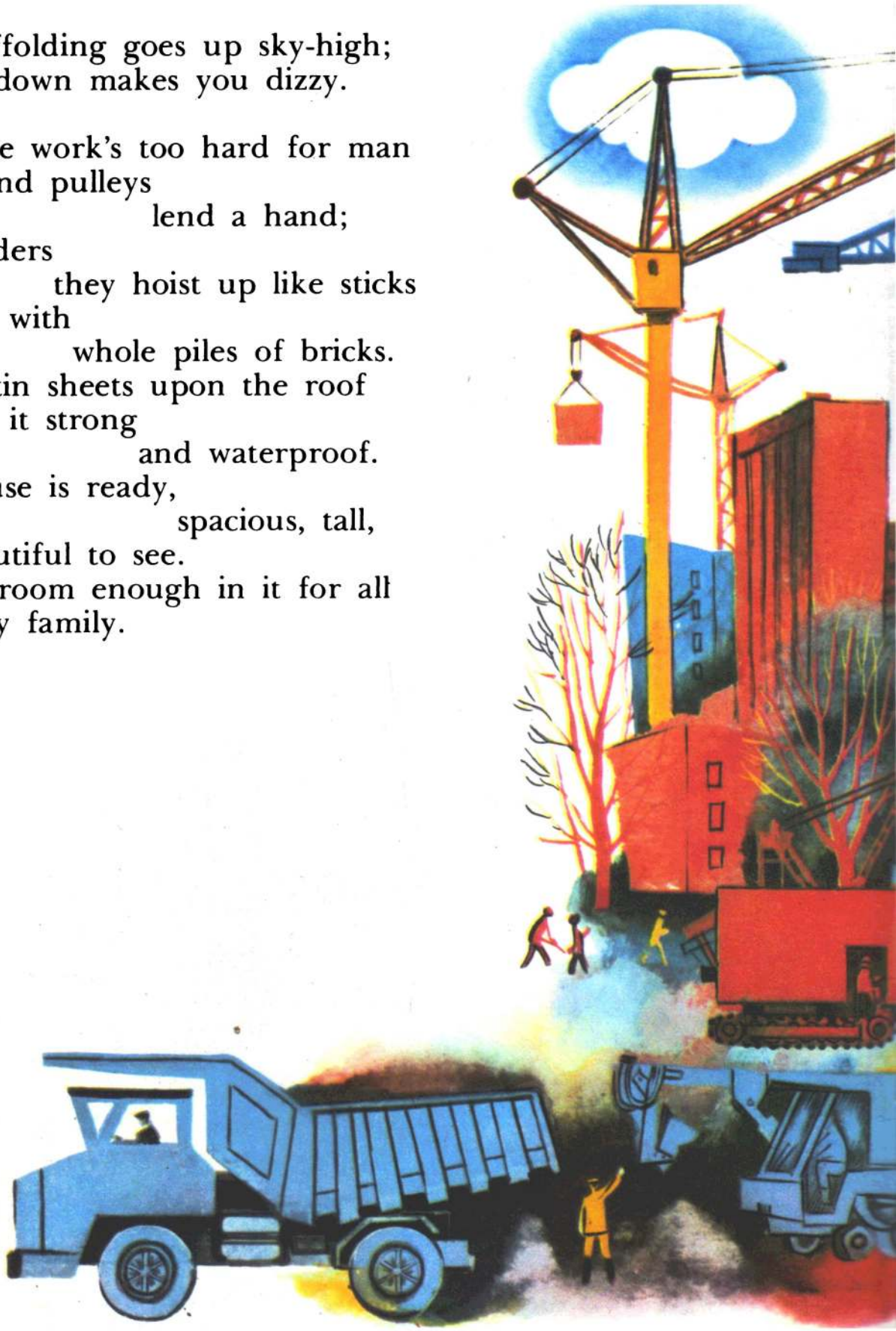


If
we need
a ball or knob
a lathe is used
to do the job.
One by one we make the parts,
then the work of joining starts.
Wardrobe, armchair,
table, chest—
neat and strong—
the very best!

Making furniture is good
yet building is no worse.
I'd be a builder, yes, I would,
Just let them teach me first.
I'd make a drawing
for a start
Of a house
that's to my heart.
What the builders have to do
is make the house look fine,
spacious, handsome,
nice and new,
windows all ashine!
Here's the front—
it's called *façade;*
there
the garden will be laid.
Here we'll have a gravel path,
there the pantry and the bath.
The drawing's finished.
You and I
and all the rest get busy.

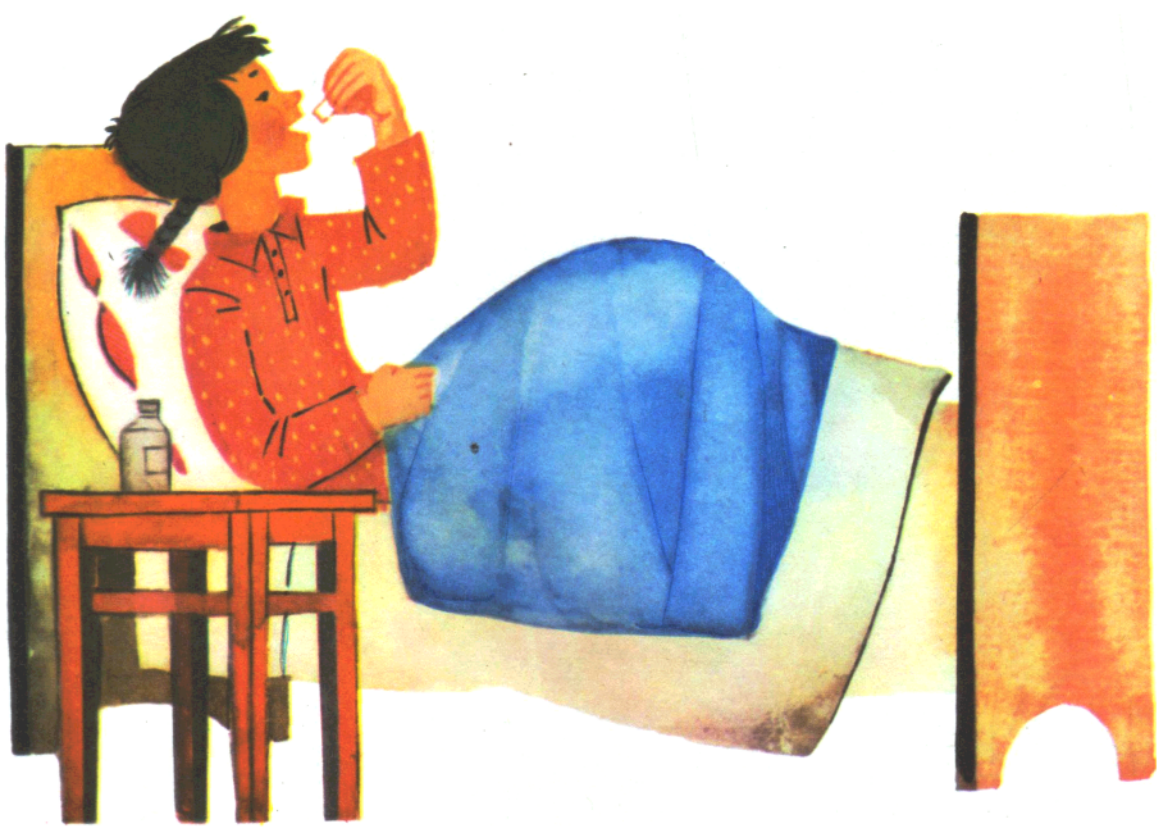


The scaffolding goes up sky-high;
to look down makes you dizzy.
Where
the work's too hard for man
cranes and pulleys
lend a hand;
steel girders
they hoist up like sticks
together with
whole piles of bricks.
We lay tin sheets upon the roof
to make it strong
and waterproof.
The house is ready,
spacious, tall,
and beautiful to see.
There's room enough in it for all
for every family.

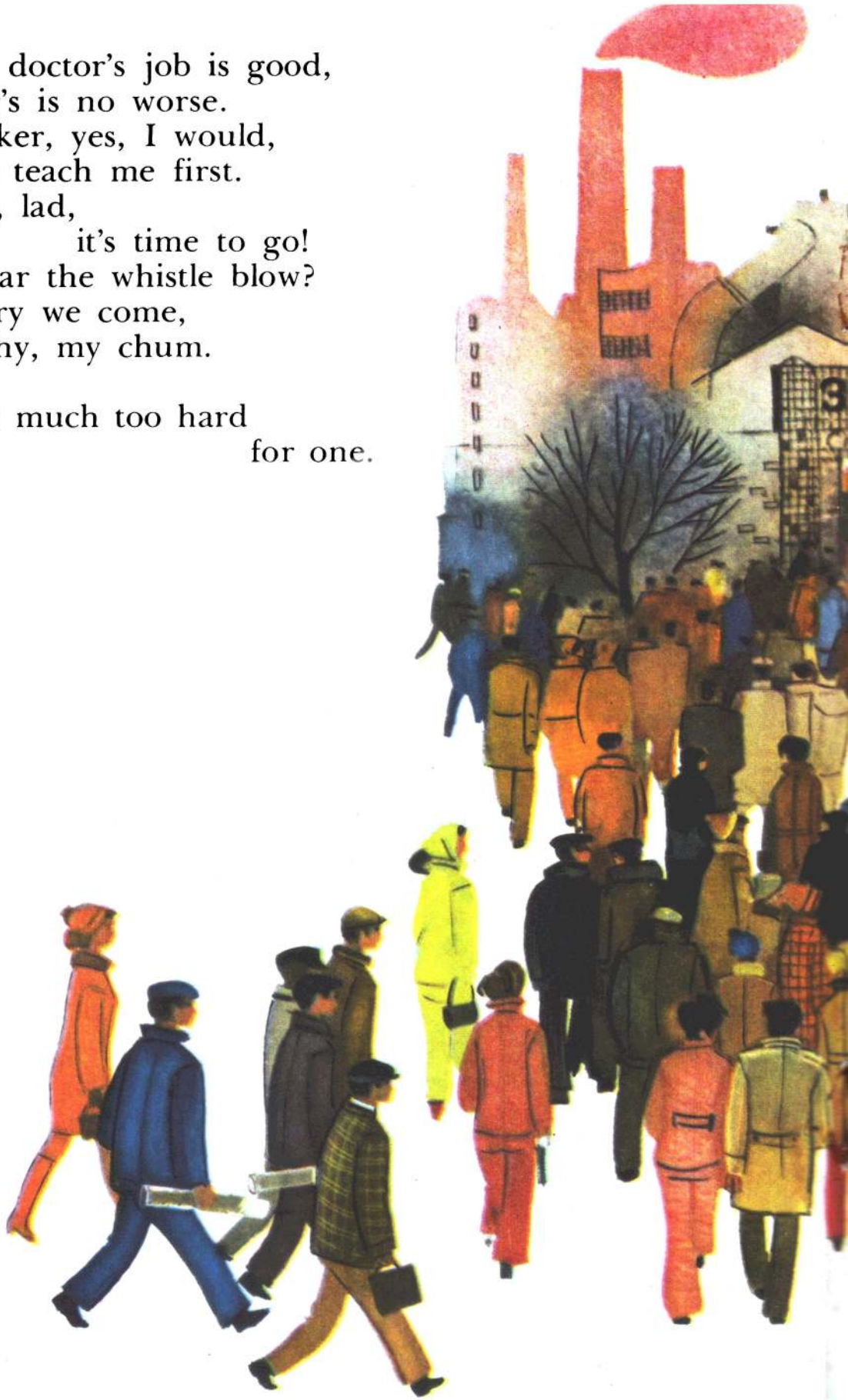


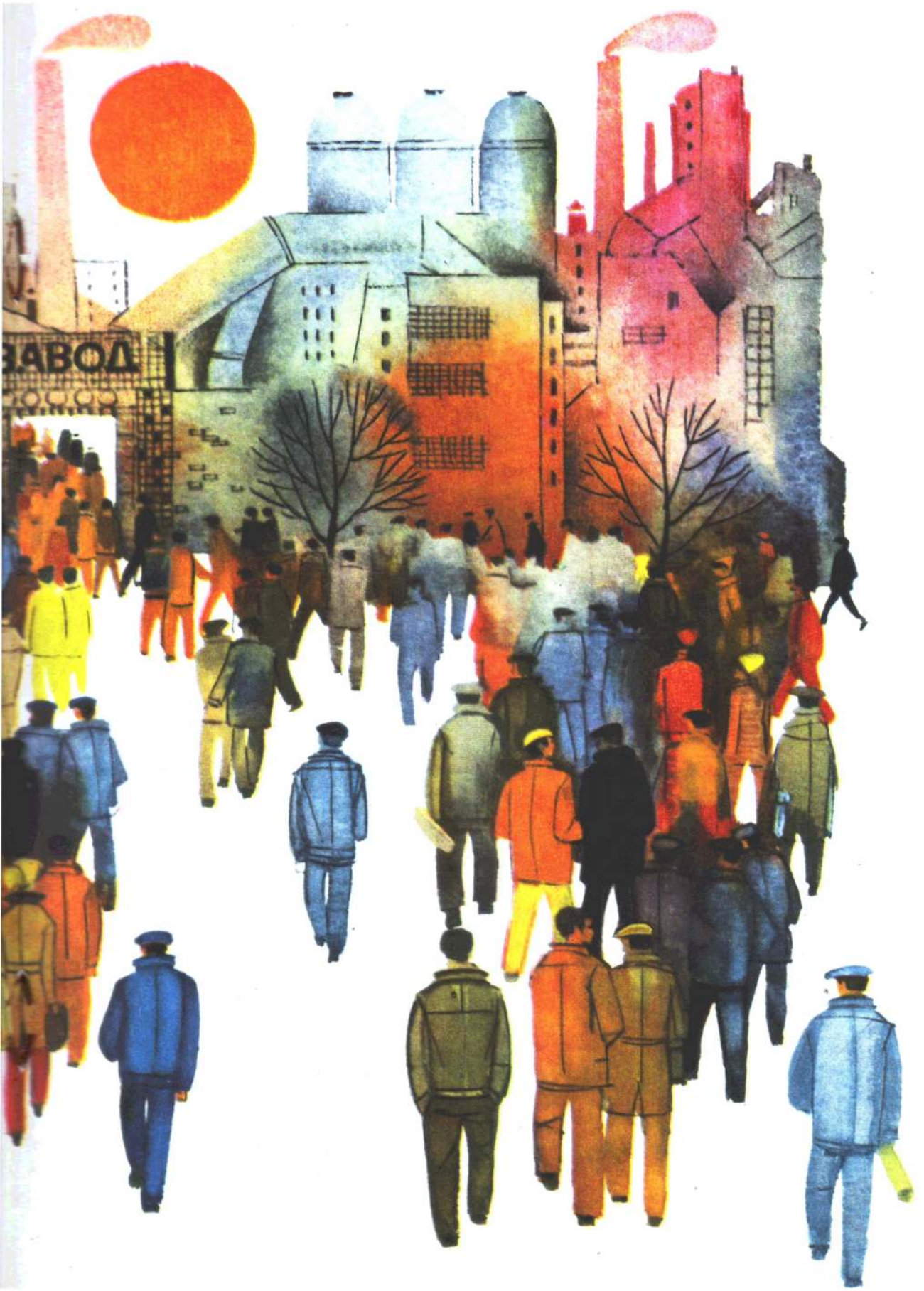
It's good to be a builder,
but a doctor's job's no worse.
I'd gladly cure sick children,
just let them teach me first.
I'd go to Pete,
I'd go to Bill:
"Hello there, boys!
Now, who is ill?"
Stick your tongue out—
right you are—
that's the spirit—
now say *Ah!*
Put this thermometer
under your tongue.

Don't be afraid,
you won't get stung!"
I'll ask little Bill
to swallow a pill
and give powders to Pete;
each and every I'll treat!
I'll tell little Ned
to stay in bed
till he's healthy again
and forgets his pain!
With a pat on his tummy
I'll turn to his Mummy
and give her prescriptions
for medicine drops.
I'll tell her they ought to
be taken in water
three times a day
till the fever stops.

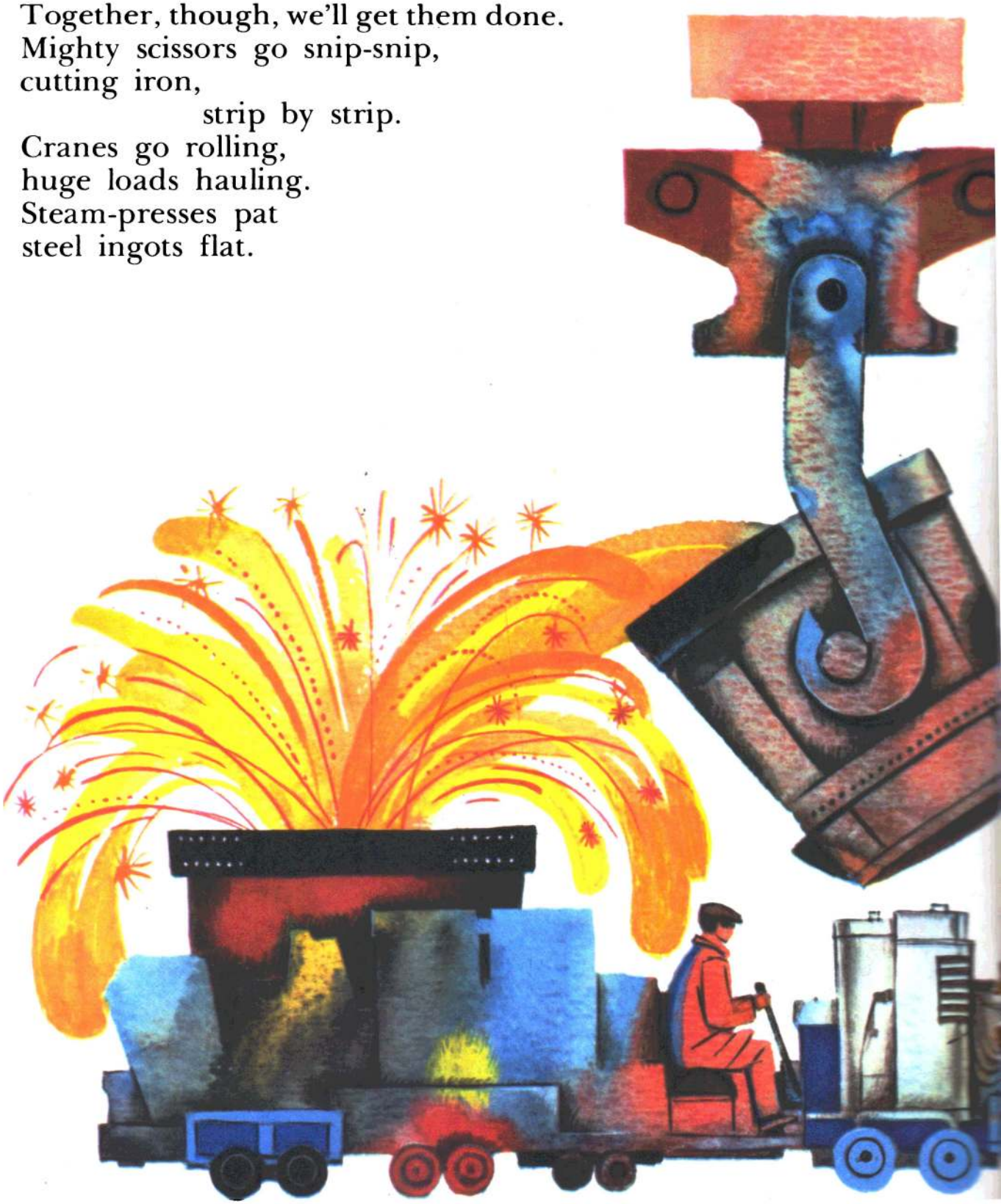


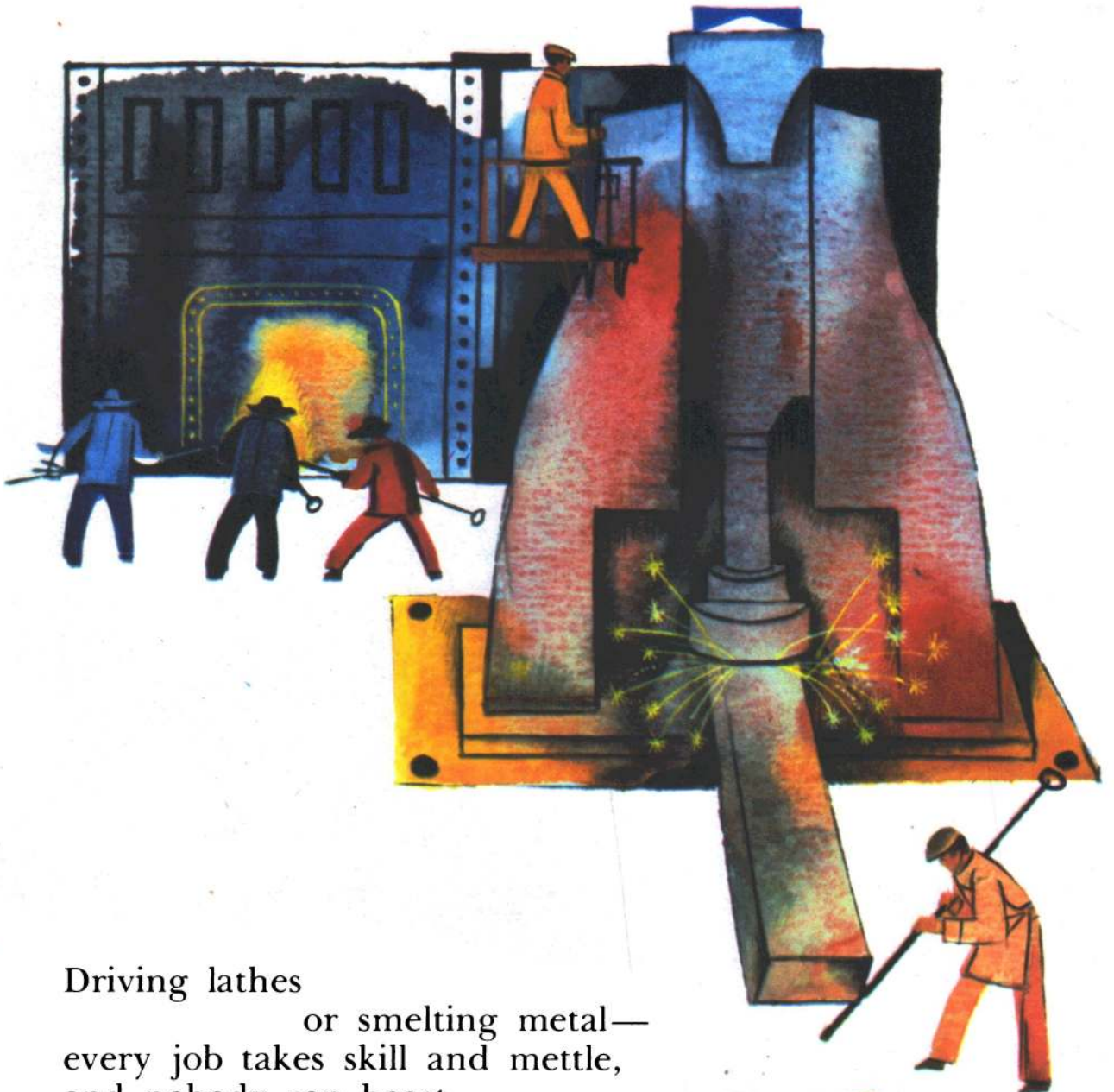
Of course, a doctor's job is good,
but a worker's is no worse.
I'd be a worker, yes, I would,
just let them teach me first.
Now, stir up, lad,
it's time to go!
Can't you hear the whistle blow?
To the factory we come,
I and Timothy, my chum.
Some jobs
are much too hard
for one.




ЗАВОД

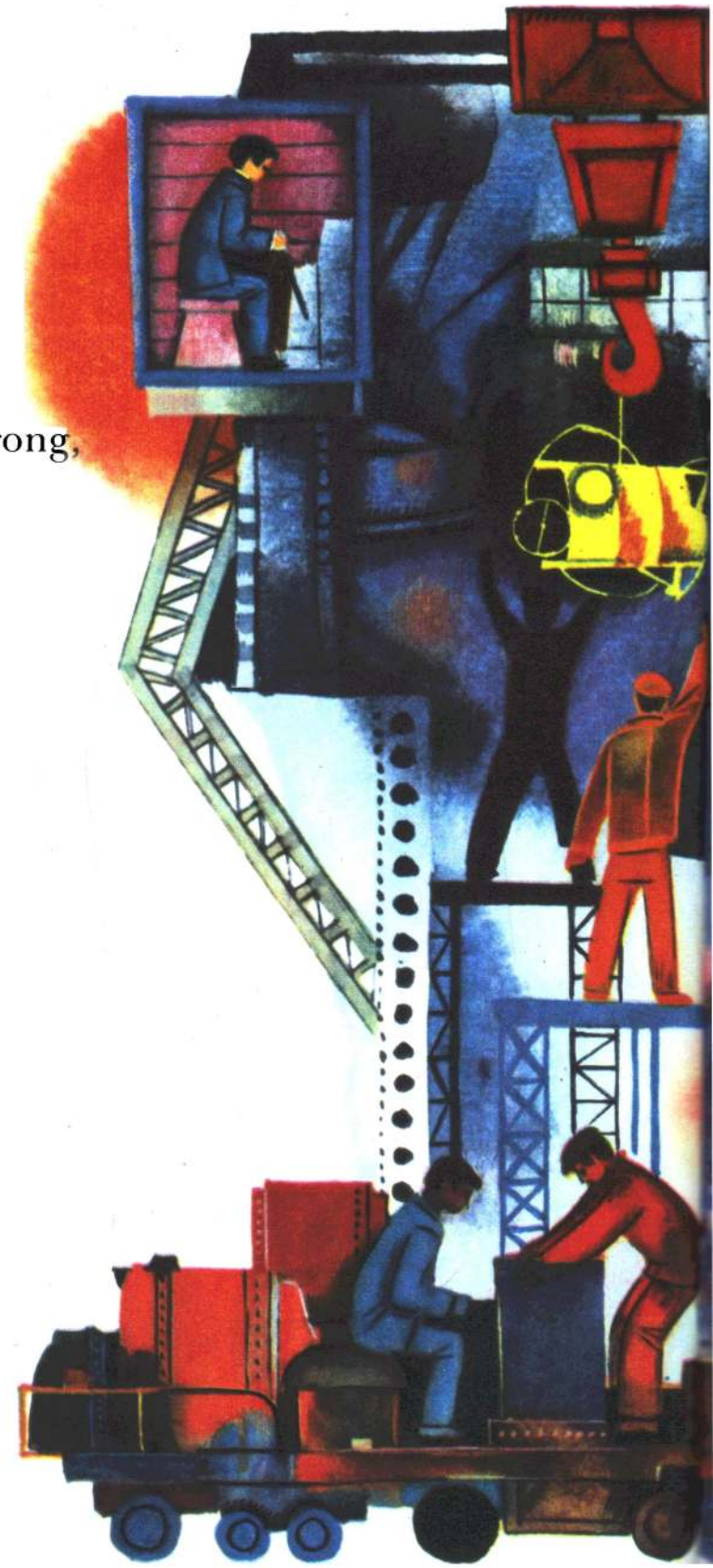
Together, though, we'll get them done.
Mighty scissors go snip-snip,
cutting iron,
strip by strip.
Cranes go rolling,
huge loads hauling.
Steam-presses pat
steel ingots flat.

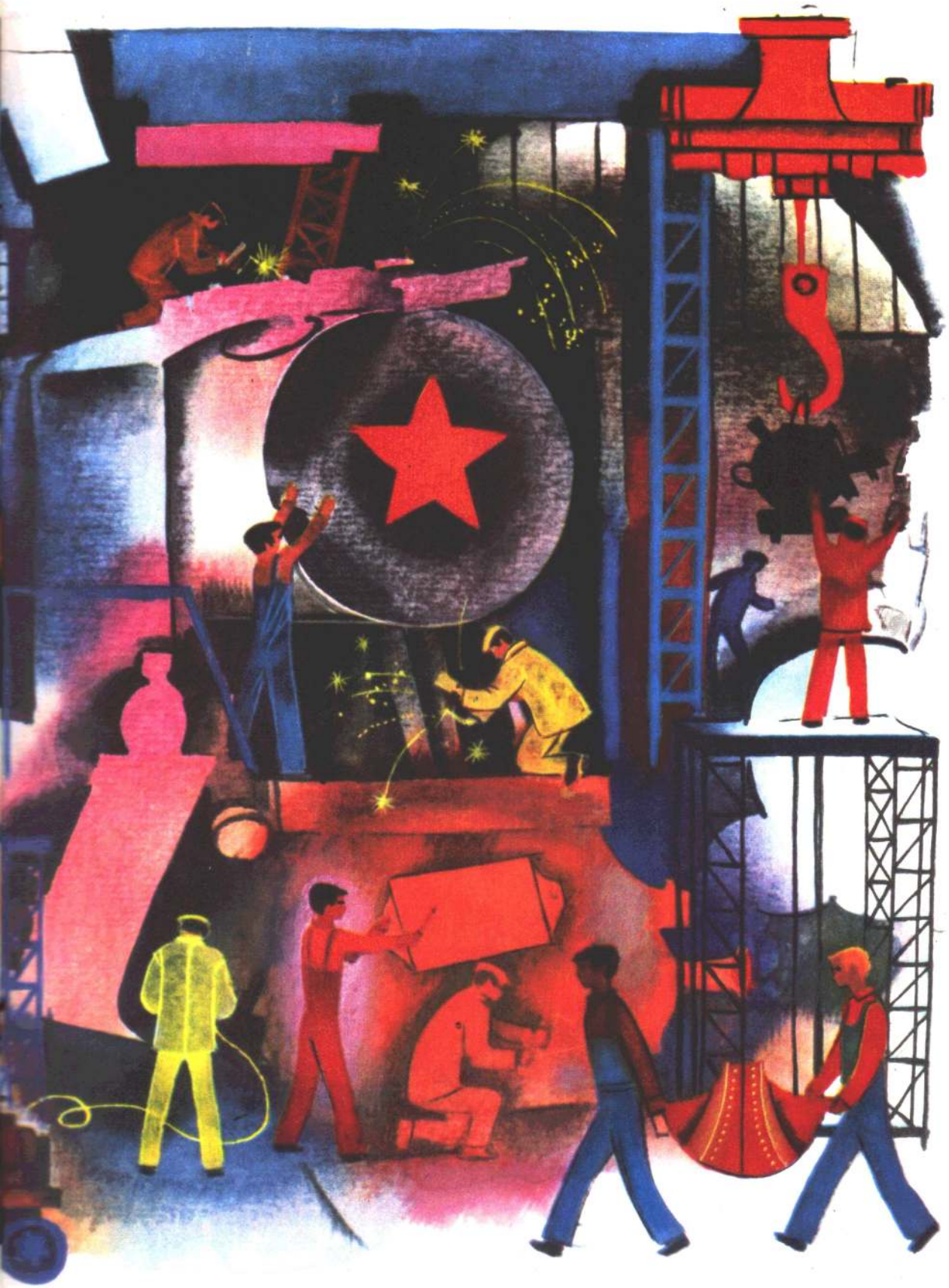


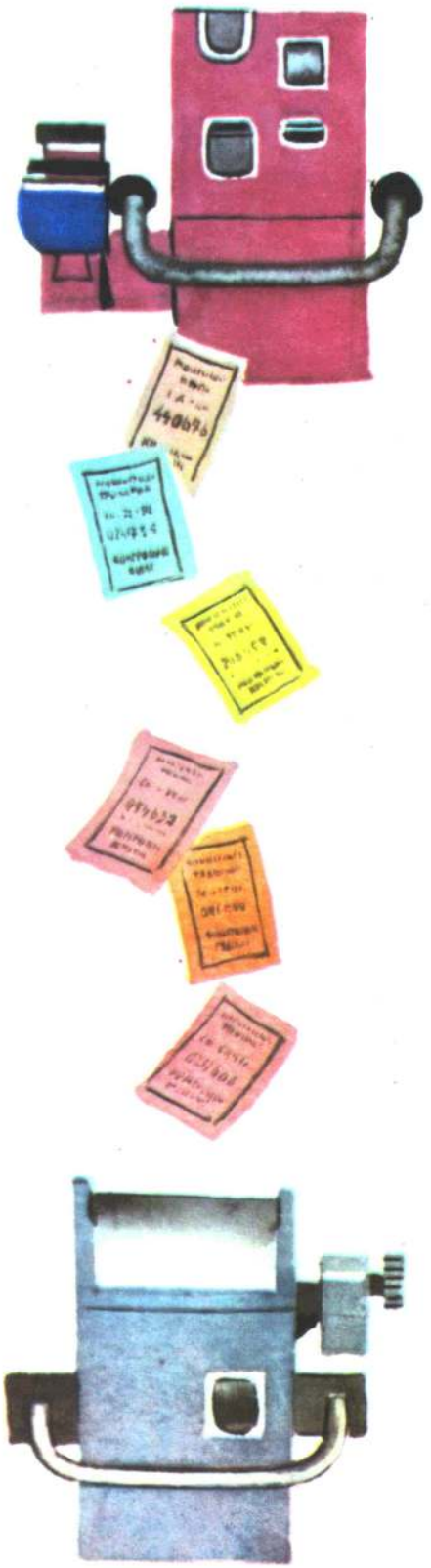


Driving lathes
or smelting metal—
every job takes skill and mettle,
and nobody can boast
that his is needed most.
I'll make an iron nut,
and you
forge a tightly-fitting screw.
Then the work of each,
non-stop,
goes to the assembly-shop.

Every screw
gets in its hole,
fixing parts
into one whole.
The rafters shake,
such a noise we make.
Thunder,
lightning,
almost frightening!
And now an engine,
huge and strong,
rolls out
to pull a train along.

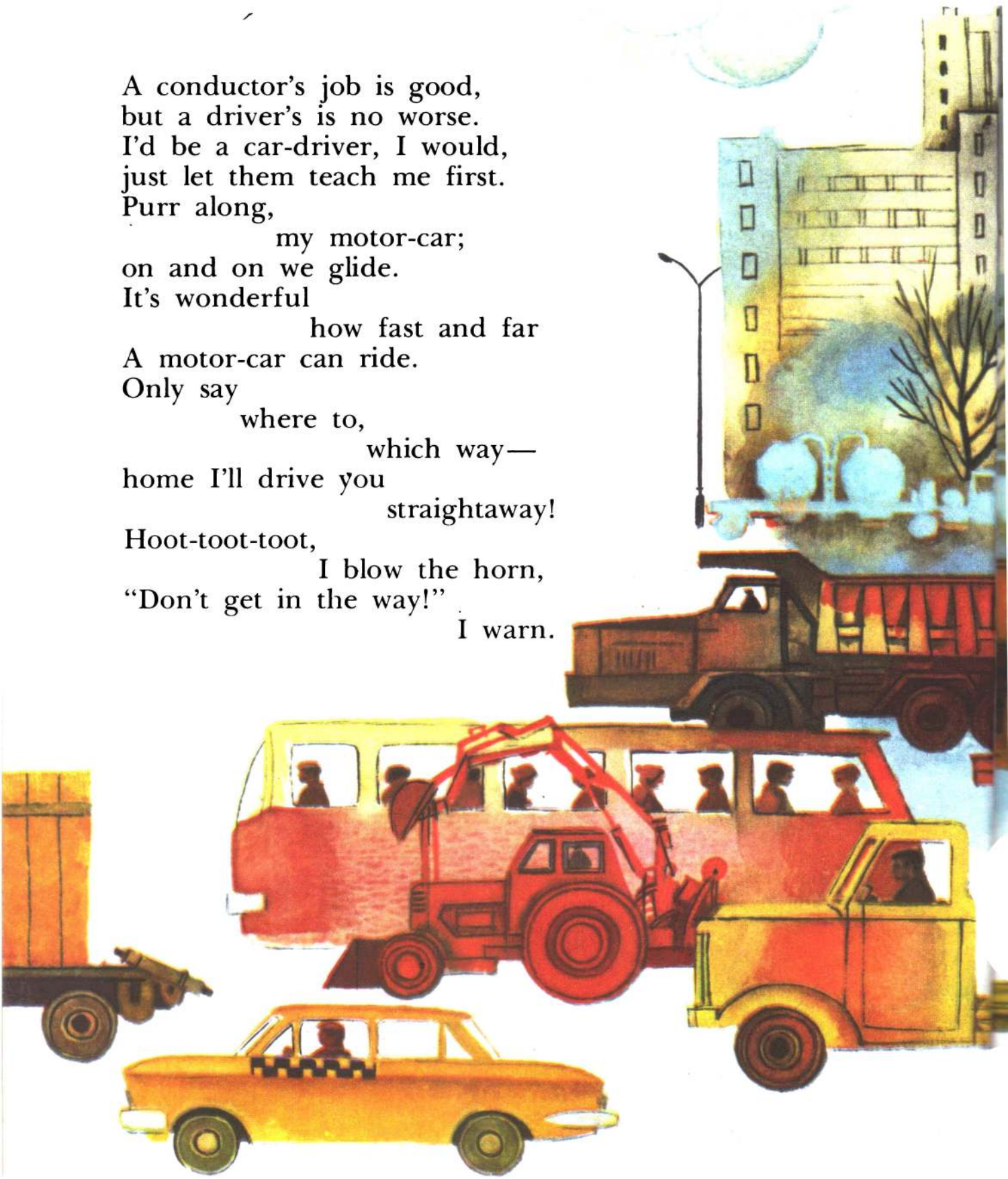


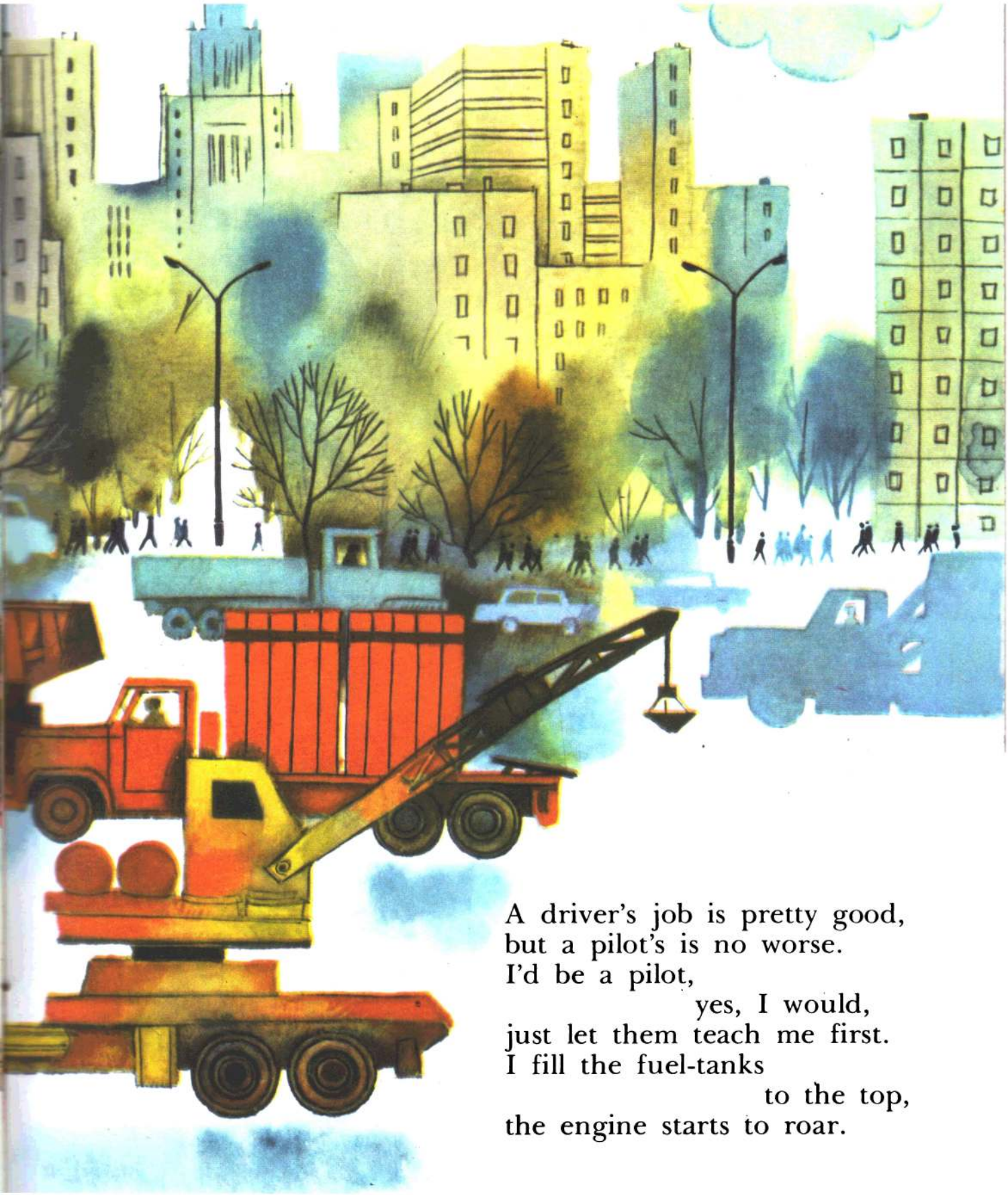




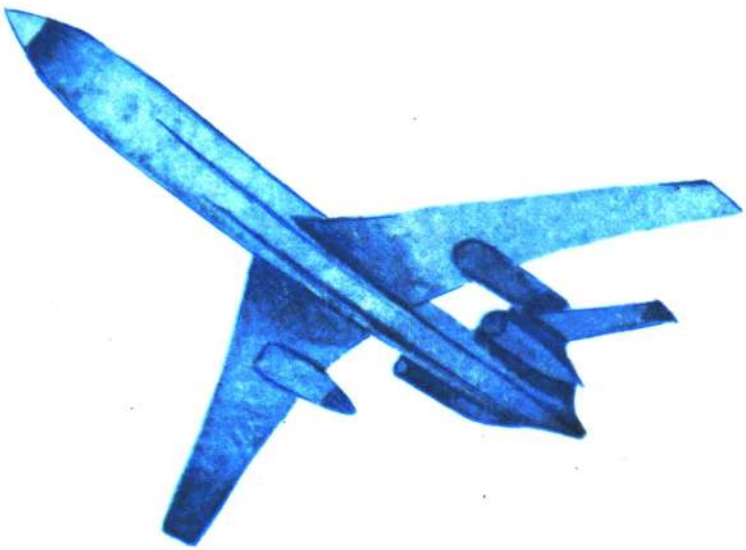
It's jolly good,
a factory,
but a tramcar is no worse.
A conductor's
is the job for me,
just let them teach me first.
Conductors!
Aren't they lucky chaps!
With great big bags
on leather straps,
everywhere
and all day long
in their trams
they ride along,
selling tickets to us all:
parents, children,
big and small,
tickets yellow,
blue and red
for me, for you,
for Pete and Ned.
Along rails we ride
through the traffic tide.
Now the rails have ended;
get out,
everyone!
Isn't it splendid,
the woods,
the sun!

A conductor's job is good,
but a driver's is no worse.
I'd be a car-driver, I would,
just let them teach me first.
Purr along,
my motor-car;
on and on we glide.
It's wonderful
how fast and far
A motor-car can ride.
Only say
where to,
which way—
home I'll drive you
straightaway!
Hoot-toot-toot,
I blow the horn,
"Don't get in the way!"
I warn.





A driver's job is pretty good,
but a pilot's is no worse.
I'd be a pilot,
yes, I would,
just let them teach me first.
I fill the fuel-tanks
to the top,
the engine starts to roar.



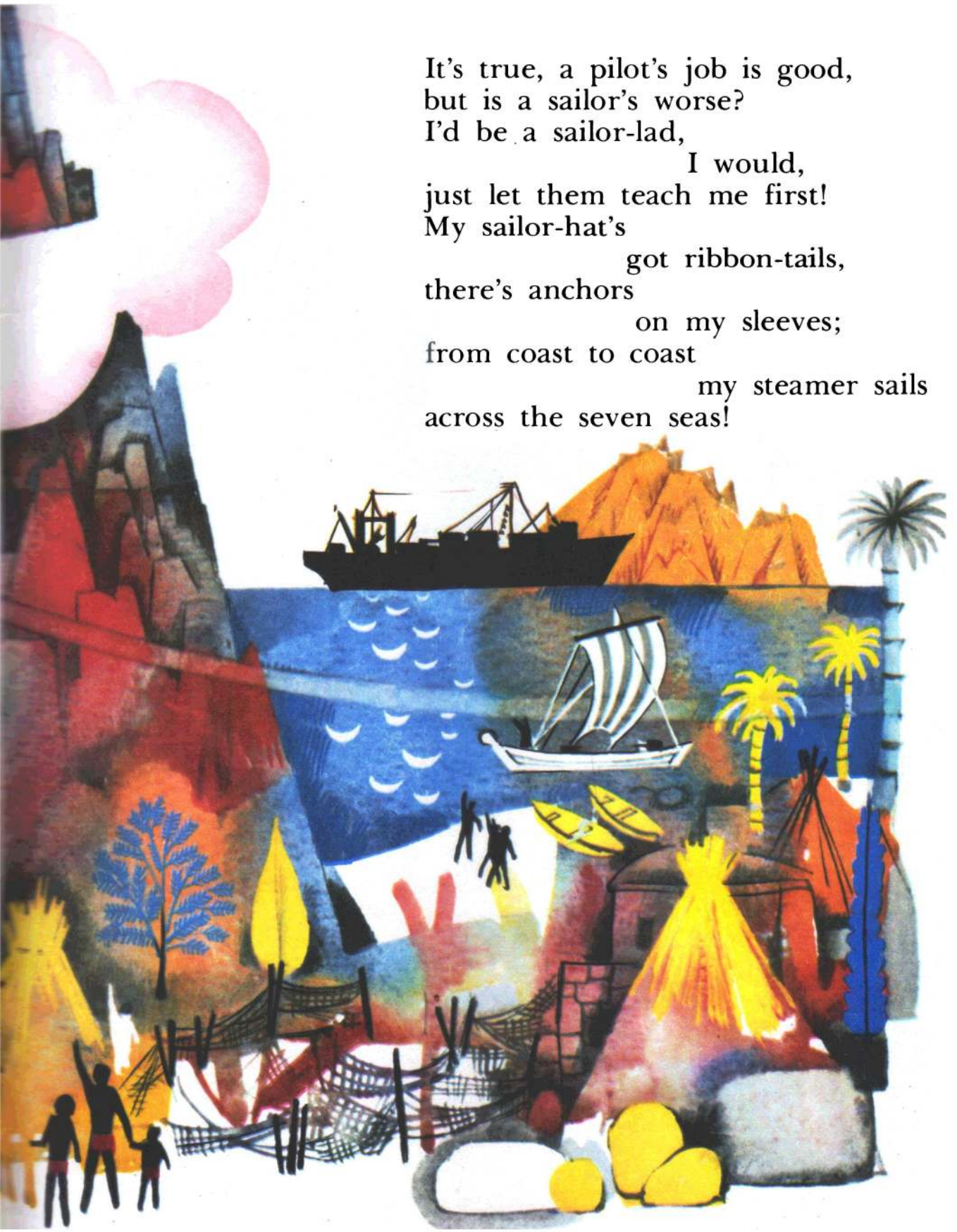
Fly me,
engine,
up and up,

where the eagles soar!
It doesn't matter
if we meet
rain or snow

or hail and sleet—
up we go above the clouds
gathering in fluffy crowds!
Like the birds
my plane and I
over seas and oceans fly.

Drive me, engine, to the moon,
a planet and a star,
although I know how very far
the stars and planets are!

It's true, a pilot's job is good,
but is a sailor's worse?
I'd be a sailor-lad,
I would,
just let them teach me first!
My sailor-hat's
got ribbon-tails,
there's anchors
on my sleeves;
from coast to coast
my steamer sails
across the seven seas!



The waves leap high,
the billows toss,
all roaring angrily.
But I just skim
across their tops,
no waves too high for me!

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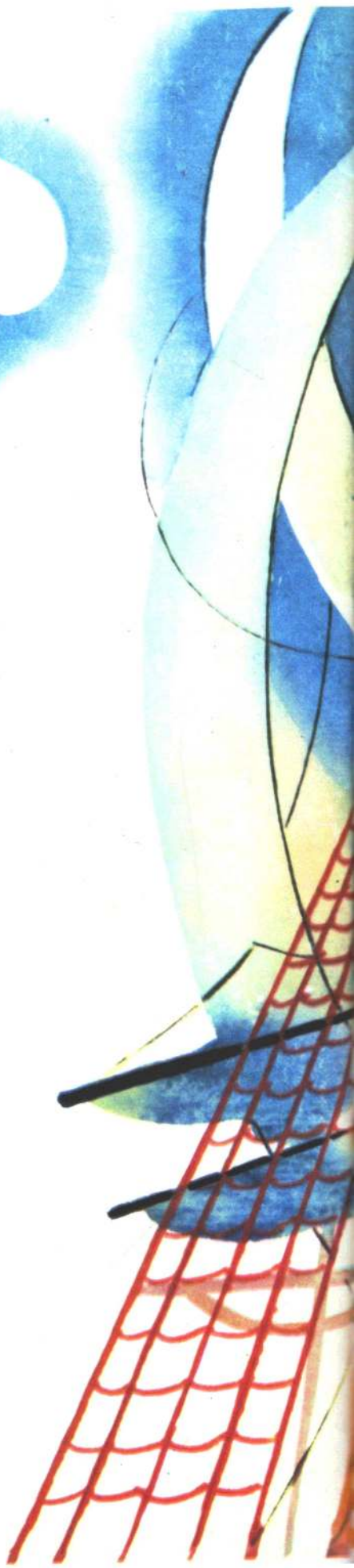
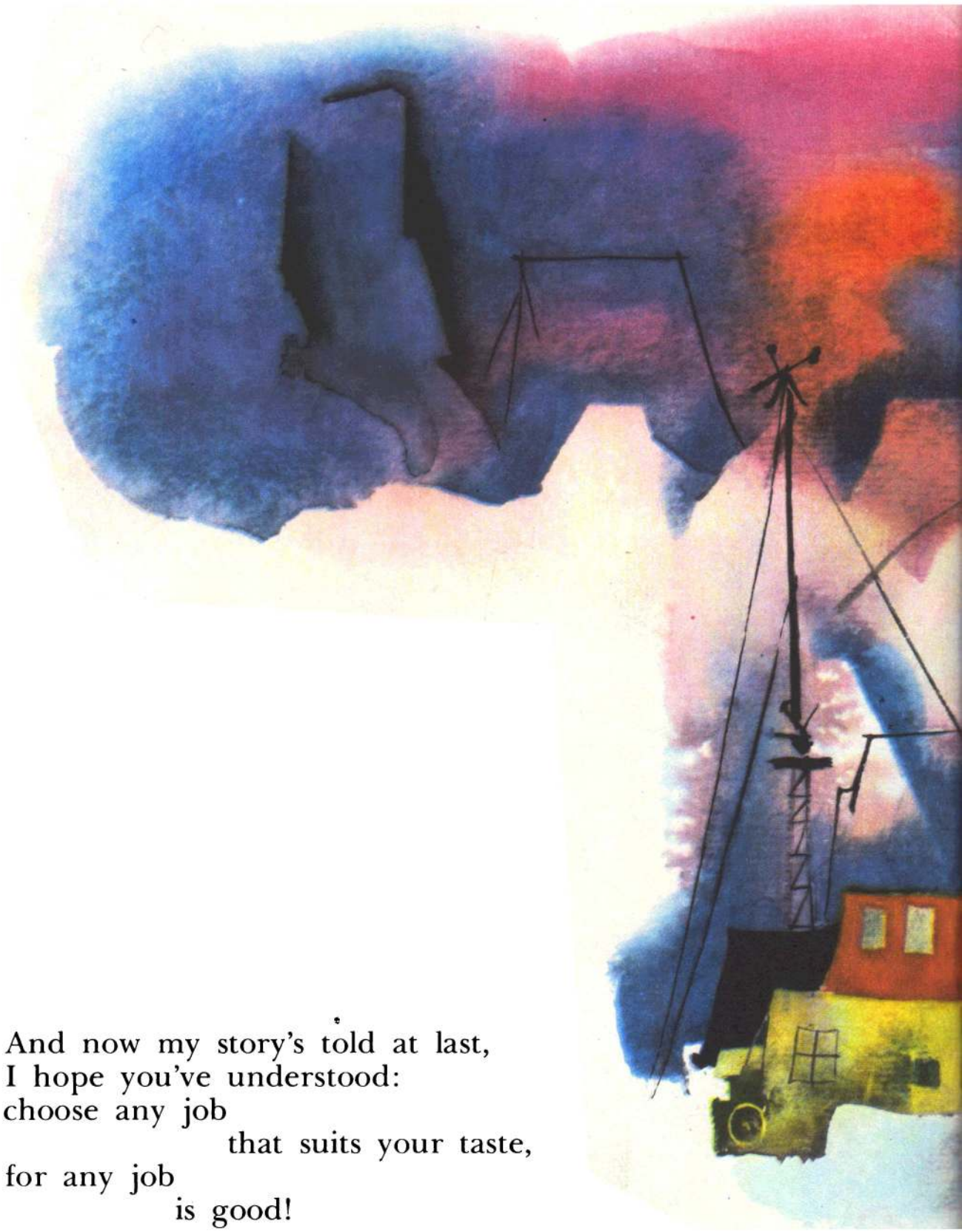


Calm down,
mad tempest,
shut your mouth,
give up, wind,
and don't wail!
I'll reach the Poles,
both North and South,
in spite of any gale!



And now my story's told at last,
I hope you've understood:
choose any job
that suits your taste,
for any job
is good!

Translated from the Russian by *Dorian Rottenberg*

Drawings by *B. Gurevich*

**В. Маяковский**

**КЕМ БЫТЬ?**

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